

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

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May 21, 2019

Pat A. Cipollone
Office of White House Counsel
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Cipollone,

I write to request that the White House provide information about how and by what measure it reimburses the public for political travel, including aboard Air Force One.

Recent news reports indicate that President Trump flew to more than 40 political rallies in advance of the 2018 midterm elections.¹ His campaign-related travel in advance of the 2020 election is well underway.

The president frequently mixes official travel with campaign-related political purposes, which raises questions about whether American taxpayers are footing the bill for political travel that should be paid for by his campaign.² Last week President Trump traveled to New York City for a fundraising dinner at a Wall Street executive's home.³ As he flew to the event, the president filmed a video criticizing a newly announced opponent in the presidential race.⁴ He then distributed the video on Twitter, where it showed the president at his desk aboard the aircraft, with the presidential seal positioned conspicuously behind him.⁵ Nonpartisan ethics watchdogs roundly criticized the president's actions.⁶

¹ Justin Rohrlich, Heather Timmons, and Daniel Wolfe, "Flying Trump to Midterm Rallies to Stump for Republicans Cost Taxpayers Millions," Quartz, Dec. 3, 2018, <https://qz.com/1476502/flying-trump-to-midterm-rallies-for-republicans-cost-us-taxpayers-millions/>; Dave Levinthal, "Donald Trump Created a Permanent Presidential Campaign. Here's How," Feb. 18, 2019, <https://publicintegrity.org/federal-politics/donald-trump-president-campaign-money-fundraising/>.

² David Nakamura, "Trump's Travel Expenses Test Boundaries of Policy and Politics," Chicago Tribune, Jan. 18, 2018, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/ct-trump-travel-expenses-politics-20180118-story.html>.

³ Chris Sommerfeldt, "President Trump to Attend Swanky Fundraiser in Manhattan Hosted by Billionaire Wall Street Bigwig," N.Y. Daily News, May 16, 2019, <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/ny-trump-manhattan-fundraiser-wall-street-ceo-20190517-2x3mjwvirkvc5tejj6mtxtbdqpe-story.html>.

⁴ Colby Itkowitz, "'It's Entirely Inappropriate:' Trump Shot a Political Video on Air Force One," May 18, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/its-entirely-inappropriate-trump-shot-a-political-video-on-air-force-one/2019/05/18/58432016-78a7-11e9-b3f5-5673edf2d127_story.html?utm_term=.8c2e46ee7cf0.

⁵ Tweet from @realDonaldTrump, May 16, 2019 at 6:11pm, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1129147418682040320>.

⁶ See Itkowitz, *supra* note 4.

As you know, federal law provides that appropriated funds should only be used for the purposes for which they are appropriated.⁷ Moreover, campaign finance regulations provide rules governing how a campaign, including a presidential campaign, should pay for travel aboard a government aircraft.⁸


There is opacity in the way the White House designates an event as “political” versus “official.” It is generally understood that the White House uses a formula—some say it was first adopted during the Reagan administration—to apportion how travel costs are covered for political events.⁹ The Trump campaign has disclosed disbursements for travel costs to the Department of Treasury, as well as debts that it owes, in recent Federal Election Commission disclosure reports. However, because the formula that the White House uses to determine reimbursement rates is shrouded from public scrutiny, the public has very little insight into whether and by what magnitude the American taxpayer is subsidizing the president’s campaign activities, including how the White House determines which events merit reimbursement.

I respectfully request that you provide the Committee with the following information no later than June 20, 2019:

1. Any documents, communications, and records that provide guidance concerning how expenses are apportioned for official and non-official (including political) travel, including mixed-purpose trips. Please include the formula and/or policy documents that the White House uses to classify presidential travel as political.
2. A list of all events that the White House determined required payment from the president’s campaign committee to cover travel expenses, a breakdown of associated costs, and any associated records concerning payment.
3. A list of all events that the White House determined required payment from another political committee, including a national party committee, to cover travel expenses, a breakdown of associated costs, and any associated records concerning payment.
4. Any guidance from the Department of Justice or the Federal Election Commission concerning presidential travel, including travel by the Vice President.

Thank you for cooperation with this matter.

Sincerely,



Zoe Lofgren
Chairperson

⁷ 31 U.S.C. § 1301(a).

⁸ 11 C.F.R. § 100.93.

⁹ See Nakamura, *supra* note 2; L. Elaine Halchin, “Presidential Travel: Policy and Costs,” Congressional Research Service, May 17, 2012.